CHARACTER DESIGN

& CREATURE COLLECTION

DEVLOPMENT & EXPLORATION ARTBOOK

By Jekaterina Markova

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INTRODUCTION

This artbook was created by Jekaterina Markova, a 3rd year student at Saxion University of Applied Sciences for a Minor Skilled Project.

The goal of this artbook was to create 3 individual characters with justified design choices. Each character would go through an exploration of how their appearances came to be and how their personality traits developed. This artbook is a dive into the imaginative process behind creating these unique characters and additional fantastical creatures, exploring the delicate balance between design and narrative, without a heavy emphasis on world-building.

Through sketches, colour studies, and fully rendered designs, this collection captures each character from concept to realization. Whether inspired by ancient myths, vibrant cultures, or the untamed wilds, this artbook showcases the creativity and the detailed process that goes into breathing life into new worlds. This compilation is not only an assemblage of artworks; it is an exploration of ideas, a visual diary capturing the evolution of concepts.

SETTING

This is a fantasy world full of unknown and mystical places, mages, witches, and monsters. In the focus, we have a Northern region and a Southern region which differentiate not only in culture and mentality between each other but also amongst themselves. The Southern Kingdom is a more developed state with a few bigger cities – the main capital being the biggest. It is an Empire with a strong military. The Empire is ruled by the Pentarchy – 5 lands that come together.

The Northern Lands consist of a few Tribes that reside on the northern side of the island with cultures that slightly differentiate from one another. A bigger Kingdom residing in the east-south. The kingdom just recently has been through a coop organised by the current queen. The area is mostly covered by very dense forest making the interactions between different civilisations harder. People in these lands practice pagan religions varying from worshiping the forests to worshiping the creatures living near their villages.

Humans are not the only ones to inhibit these lands, other than typical animals there are also monstrous beasts that are hybrids of regular animals. There are also other creatures called spirits. There are continuous amounts of spirits ranging from mages/witches and devils who can be classified as evil spirits to smaller and harmless spirits. Spirits are amoral, and human politics and morals do not matter to them, however, what does is their goals, views, and living styles. Each entity has its own set of values and perspectives on humans.

The Mooncrest island in the middle of the Waters of the Wiatr – a stormy sea which makes interaction between North and South continents difficult has its own native population. There are no monsters found on this island and recently it became trading with the Southern Pentarchy.

CHARACTERS

VELENA

THE TSARITSA OF THE NORTH

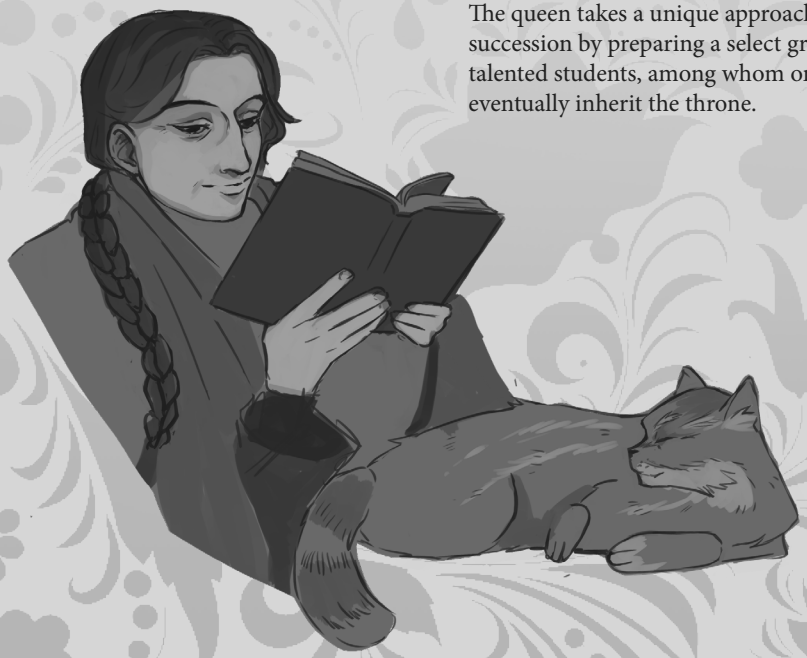
Tsaritsa Velena is the current ruler of the Northern Kindom. The strict queen exudes an aura of regal authority and unwavering discipline. Her demeanour is characterized by a commanding presence, meticulous attention to detail, and a commitment to upholding tradition and order.

She sees herself as the core of the nation, and the nation as an extension of herself. A true perfectionist, she has high expectations of herself and holds her minions to the same standard. Despite the stern exterior, her strictness is driven by a desire to maintain the integrity and stability of her kingdom. She wants to employ all available measures to turn the kingdom into a strong, well-recognized nation.

Despite her royal duties the queen is also keen to knowledge and enjoys studying alchemical sciences and magic. She funds the royal alchemical academy for young innovative minds to study and harness the secrets of potions, magical elixirs, and protective charms.

Her personal life is an enigma to many, and that is no coincidence. The queen's attention to her family members is regrettably limited. On the rare occasions when her duties do not demand her presence, she cherishes rare moments of solitude.

The queen takes a unique approach to succession by preparing a select group of talented students, among whom one will eventually inherit the throne.



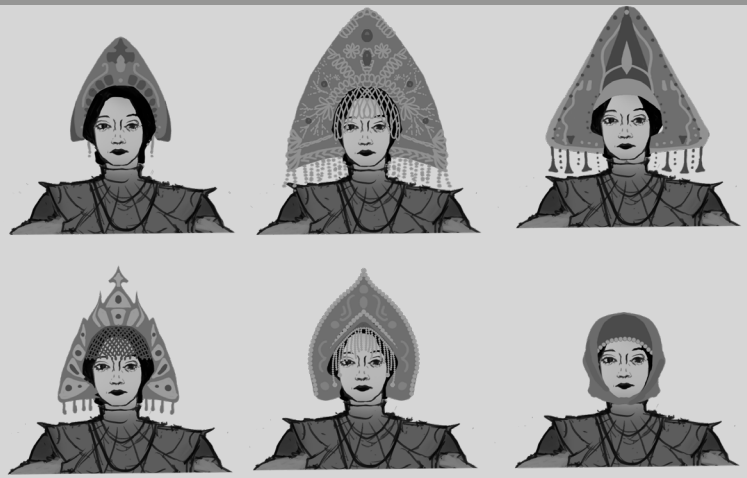
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

After the idea of a strict lady with a very regal presence, the process of creating multiple potential faces for her has started. It was important for her to show some amount of haughtiness in her facial features. A pair of deep-set eyes with a combination of thin high-set eyebrows and narrow full lips were giving the needed vibe. Black contrasting hair in a carefully put hairstyle added mild strictness to the final face.

Final Appearance

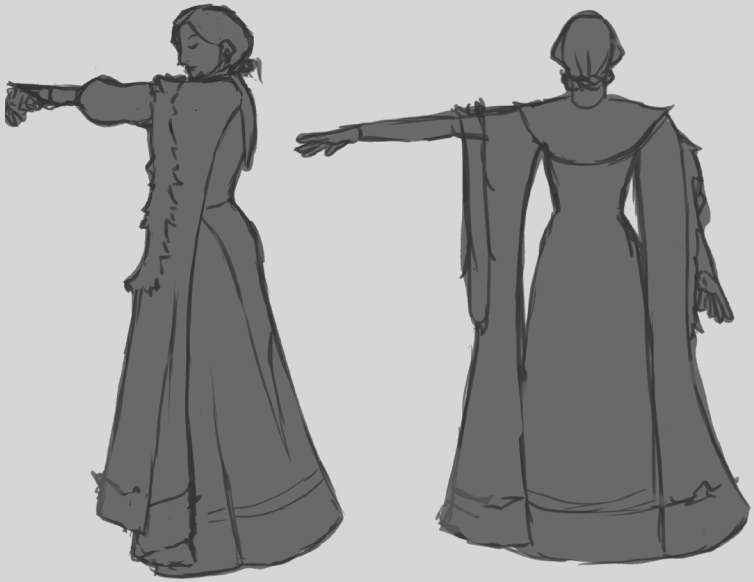
This character was inspired by Slavic culture and it's traditional clothing. The dress concepts were influenced by the multitude of gowns worn by countesses to the ball of 1903 in the Winter Palace of Imperial Russia.

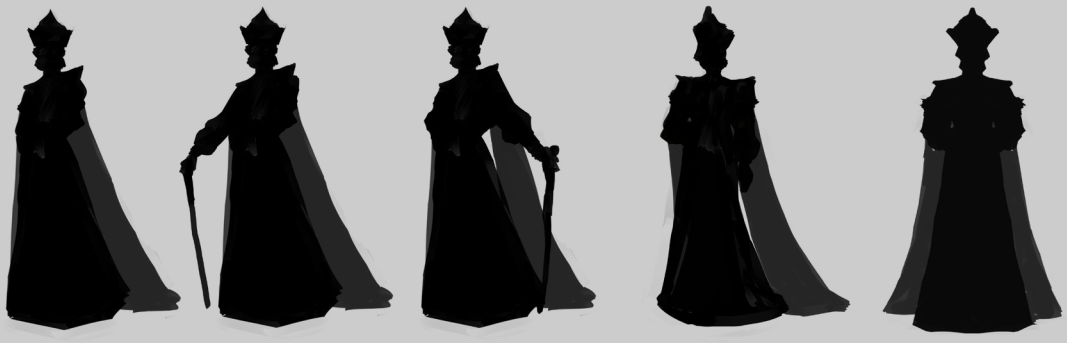
It was important for her silhouette to be recognizable. Her gown was created through trial and error, avoiding round shapes and trying to create an overall more rectangular look with triangular elements to complete it for a more menacing and dominant look. Big puffs at the shoulder area and flowy sleeves helped to create that impression.



A set of kokoshniks was created to complete the look and while they all had different effects on the overall shape structure of the crown-like kokoshnik completed the "queen" look the most.

The traditional long-sleeved dress which usually has a much flowier and lighter nature was combined with a more traditional British robe. Furry overcoats were added to the borders of the sleeves to add to the status and the nature of the climate.





A few silhouettes were created in order to find a pose that would suit her personality while staying interesting in composition . Poses that had an extended hand were making the composition more interesting and her stance more readable.

When it came to her colour palette, the conclusion was that the main theme would be in cool tones. Of course, that conclusion came to be not without experimenting with other tones that made her have a more youthful and playful aura which wasn't the intended impression from the character.

Wavering between gold and silver for her ornaments and dress elements, silver ended up providing the gloomier vibe that was needed while gold made her look more lively and energetic.

Her main colour ending up being blue, the dress looked too flat and not interesting enough without a secondary colour. The main candidates for that role being darker shades, of purple and red.

FINAL ART

The final colour palette includes blues and a gradient of dark blue into a crimson red on the sleeves to bring the main dress forward. The dress uses ornaments and textiles of cream colour contrasting the darker scheme to create more interesting elements and highlight the pose.
This artwork has a heavy emphasis on the multitude of textiles and layers that are combined to create the final look using the combination of various textures, such as velvet, silk and metals. The patterns on the textiles and gemstones being added finalised the look of the dress.

The next step was to make all of the dress aspects feel interconnected and understandable for the viewer through rendering and the polishing of the final art.

A significant addition was the staff, that gave her more characterisation. Her highness bears a subtle but noticeable limp, a result of a past injury. Her gait, typically graceful and purposeful, is marked by a slight asymmetry. She gracefully navigates with the support of the intricately crafted staff. The staff, both functional and ornate, becomes an extension of her regalia, blending seamlessly with the symbols of her authority.

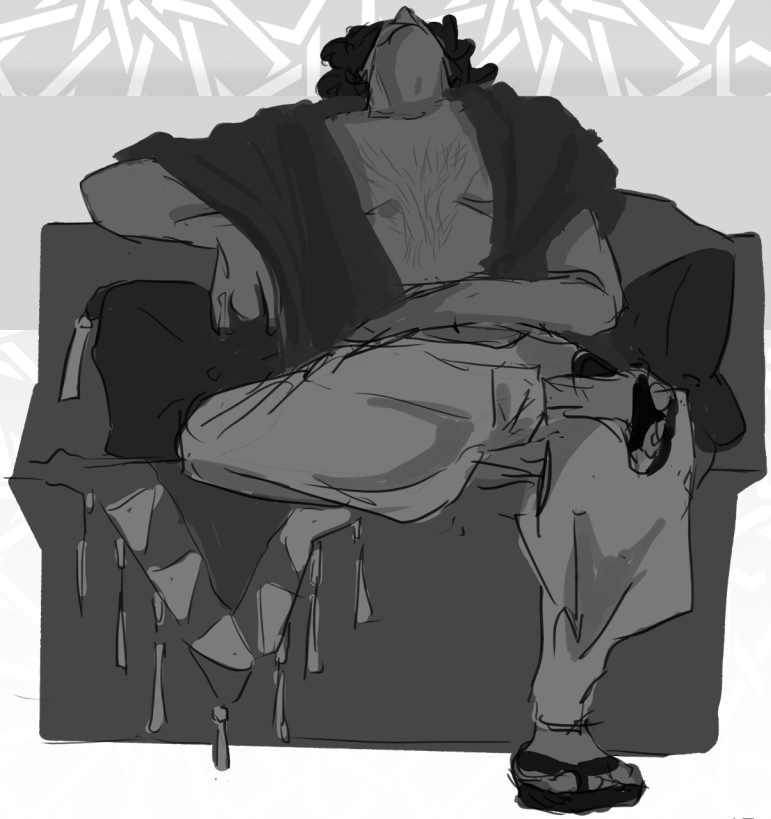
SAMYAR

The Merchant Of Lowerlands

Samyar is a major purveyor and one of the first initiators to establish trade with the isolated Northern Continent back in the day. He is a son of The Lowelands Lord, lord of one of the lands that form the Pentarchy of the Southern Empire.
His economic aspirations and bold approach caused the exploration of trade opportunities with the North, making him a fortune.

His enterprising abilities and confidence led to the pavement of the route in the Blustering Sea by sending organized ship parties to discover safer water flows. He accommodated his convoy to the dangers of the stormy waters through trial and error and was able to establish the route.

A keen negotiator, the merchant possesses a natural charm that weaves through his interactions. Although at first, he often gives people the wrong impression because of his untended looks.



While persuasive and passionate in trade matters, in his free time he is a man with an easy-going attitude towards life. Prefers playing gambling games, drinking, and sleeping while he can. Despite being hard to interest is still quite expressive with his body language and gestures.

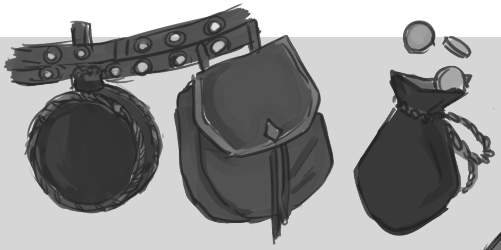
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

At first, his appearance was directed towards the creation of an expressive person with sharper features. Later on, messier hair types and facial hair seemed more appropriate to portray his attitude to hygiene. Trying out wider jaw types, they seemed to give the character a more relaxed attitude which I liked. Based on that I refined his personality more.

Gradually, he developed into a relaxed person with an easygoing nature but a messy look. He is waiting for something besides his trade and business deals to pique his interest but often fails to do so.

While his hair contributes to his carelessness in daily life, some braids add playfulness. His overall appearance reflects his laid-back way of thinking and can be associated with a pirate look. The merchant's skin is of bronze colour typical for someone accustomed to the warmth of a dry summer climate.

He has a sturdy body frame with a subtle belly but with a fair amount of muscle developed through the physical activities involved in navigating ships and enduring the challenges of the open sea. Despite the physical demands of his trade, he maintains a relaxed posture.



As his clothing exploration went on the more clothes he lost. His design includes various squarish and round shapes, to show his friendly posture. He is dressed in loose, breathable fabrics that mirror the fashion of his homeland. His clothing draws inspiration from Persian and Ottoman design elements.

He is dressed in vibrant, lightweight fabrics and flashy jewellery to establish his position and be presentable for his trade partners. Multiple cloth waistbands that he wears hide his belongings and weapons he carries around.

The variety of colours on him was firstly chosen based on the shade of his skin to have a good contrast with it. Reflecting the influence of maritime life, shades of turquoise and deep blues are present in his final design. Accents of vibrant reds add bursts of energy to the palette while the beiges add neutrality and let colours look balanced with each other.

Variety of poses and angles for the final pose.

FINAL ART

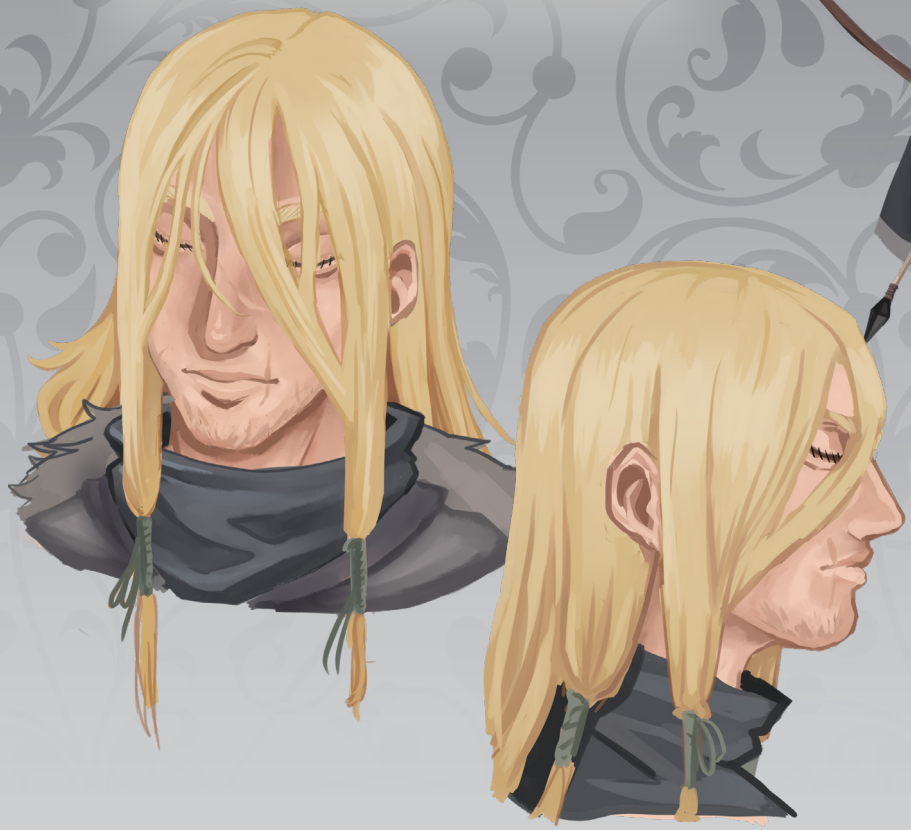
His final pose, seated on perhaps a couch with a leg-crossed style, props himself up with one of the arms while the other playfully swings around a bag of valuables. He twirls a slipper with his toes while his posture exudes an effortless ease.

He is dressed in a vibrant and relaxed style with a mix of rich textiles. Rusty reds and teals dominate his colour palette. The choice of flowing, layeredw fabrics reflects his easygoing nature, while the mix of rich colours and intricate patterns convey both his cultural background and status as a merchant. He wears various golden jewellery that gives a warm feeling to his character and emphasises his status. The final piece creates a visually striking and culturally nuanced presentation that resonates with the character's multifaceted identity.

LUCIEN

The Witchhunter

A young man living deep in the north forest with no sight ability. The hunter lost his vision when he met a witch deep in the woods and angered her with his arrogance in his youth. The witch decided to teach him a lesson and stitched his eyes shut with a magical string that can not be cut.



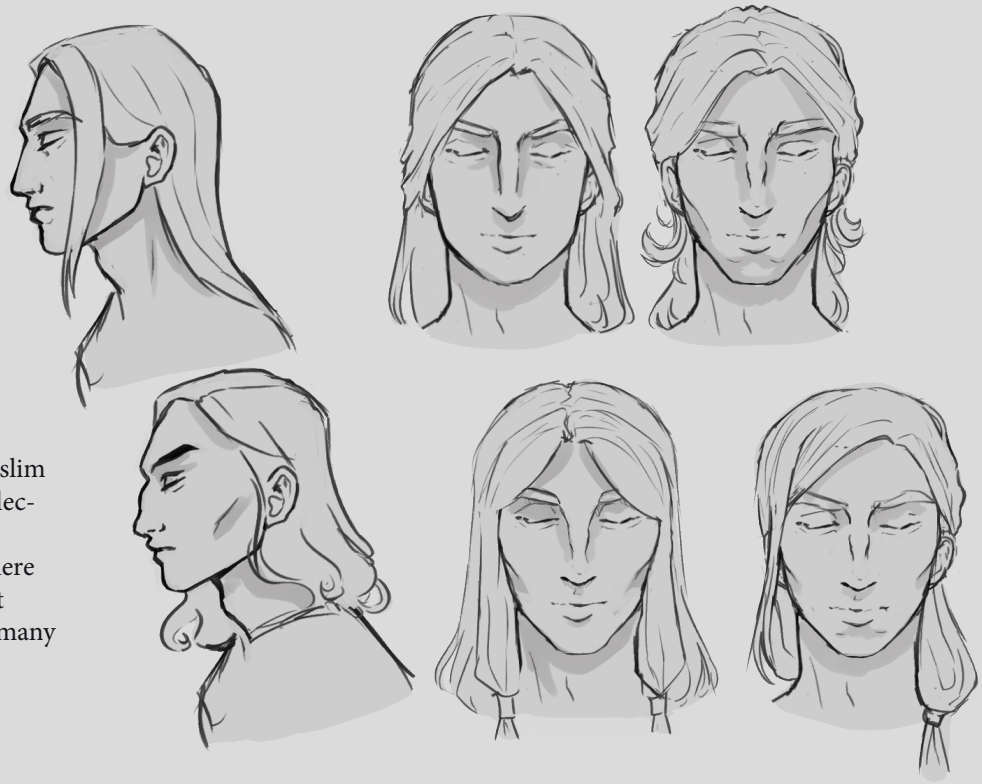
The young man comes from a wealthy family, but always felt like the odd one out. When it was time for the annual hunt the young man went deep into the forest separating away from his family's hunt attendants coming across a witch.

Going for the hunt, the talented in magic young man uses an artefact that enhances his senses. When he was cursed by the witch, the artefact allowed him to see using echolocation, which allowed him to navigate through the surroundings. He swore to find that witch, lift his curse, and take revenge.

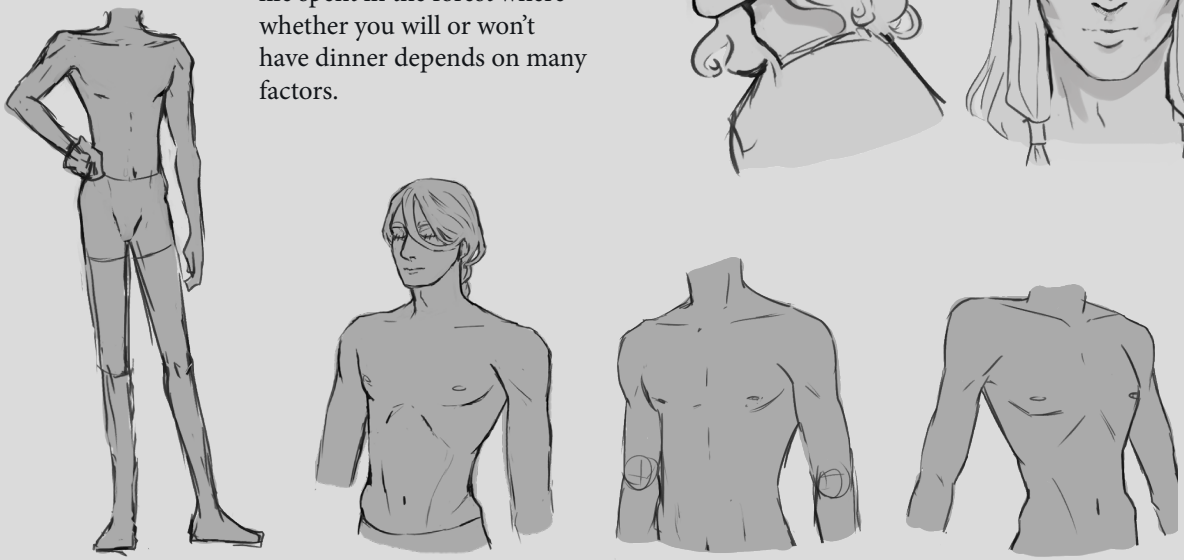
Lucien is quite arrogant and short-tempered, yet quite sensitive which he tries to hide behind his attitude. Having grown up in a wealthy family but not getting enough attention he was quite a troublemaker. He never truly connected with his siblings either and often felt an everlasting loneliness which led to him going away for hunting alone.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

When making his appearance, I set for a certain look quite fast, mostly experimenting with the details of his appearance. Most notably he has sharp features and a defined chin. His easily manageable blond hair is long enough to fall onto his shoulders.



His physique, noticeably slim to begin with became reflective of the challenges of a life spent in the forest where whether you will or won't have dinner depends on many factors.



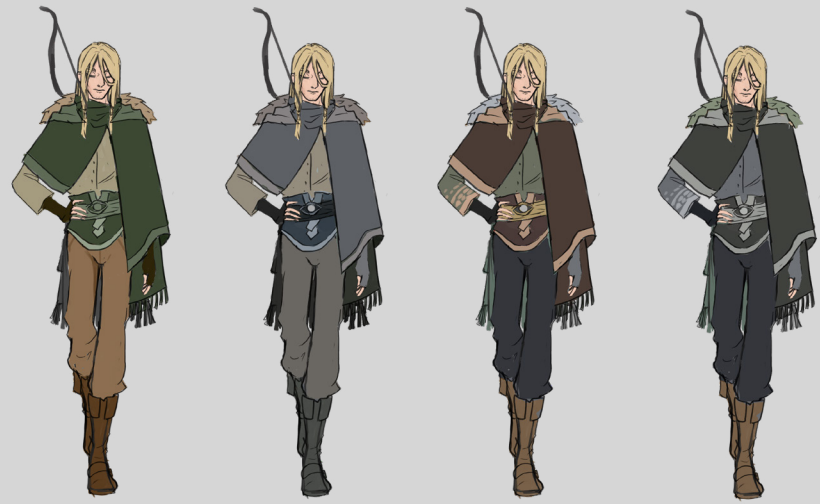
Despite his lean frame, he is quite athletic, he moves with quiet grace, harmonizing with the woodland.

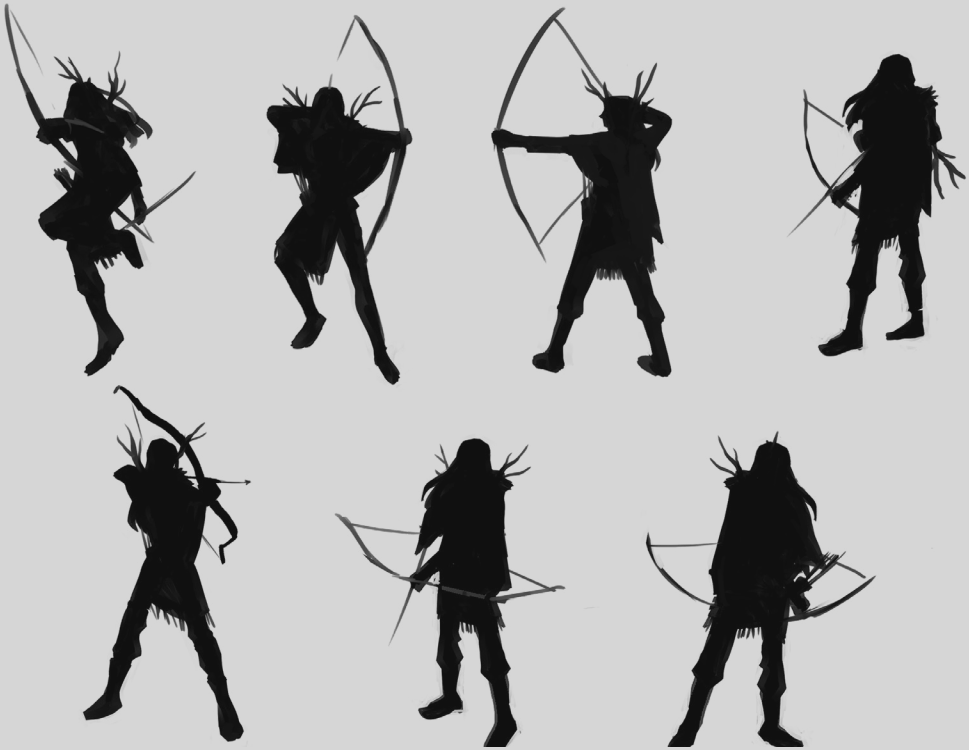
His final look looks much messier than the first concepts. His hair is greasy and he doesn't bother to remove it from his face since he doesn't use his eyes anymore. Even though he doesn't look after his hair as he used to, it is still separated in a way so that the ears aren't covered; they have replaced his eyes.

Conception his clothing needed to be convenient and practical for survival in the forest. His clothing hangs loosely, emphasizing the slender contours of his body. It was important for him to not have an overly excessive or overly accessorized design, keeping in mind that he is blind. The clothes must be fitting for the climate of the forest, it being quite cool during the night.

Final Design

His final looks include more details as well as his equipment for hunting. His artifact for seeing essence is located on his torso resembling an eye. He wears a skull from a deer to mimic more powerful creatures of the forest so he doesn't have to deal with lesser, more annoying ones.





His colour palette is consistent with earth-toned colours that would blend well with his surroundings. Being an archer I wanted to incorporate his bow in his final pose but not make it too energetic and action-oriented, to show his timid and attentive attitude in the moment when he needs to locate his target.

FINAL ART

The hunter calmly draws the arrow, listening to signs of life around him, hunting presumably his dinner. He wears rugged clothes that camouflage him in. Some of his used-up clothes emphasize his lifestyle while some like his shirt hint at his past life of luxury and prosperity. His artefact shines on his weathered waistband. The belt on it holds only essential tools and pouches, cinches.

Dressed in earth-toned garments that seamlessly blend with the forest's palette, the hunter embodies a symbiotic connection with his surroundings. His attire, adorned with subtle patterns reminiscent of leaves and branches, serves both form and function, providing camouflage amidst the lush greenery.

EXTRAS

TSAREVNA SONIA

The Tsarevna is the only daughetr of Velena. Her mother is busy with her responsibilities so she got quite spoiled by her attendats. Finds herselvef yearning for a deeper connection with her mother. The strict adherence to the responsibilities of her mothers role created a sense of emotional distance, leaving family dynamics somewhat distant and formal.

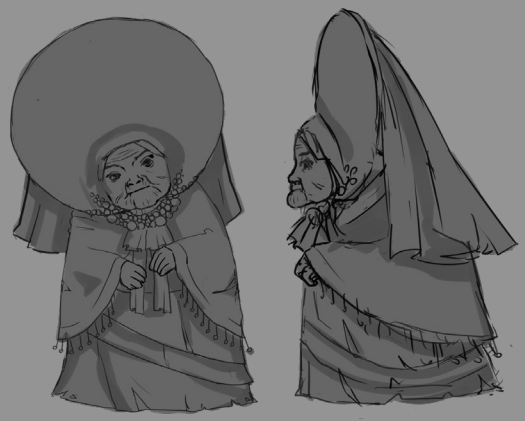
Villagers of the capital city of the Northern Kingdom

Inhabitant of the Mooncrest Isle, performing a traditional dance.

Residents of the most northern parts of the Northern Kingdom

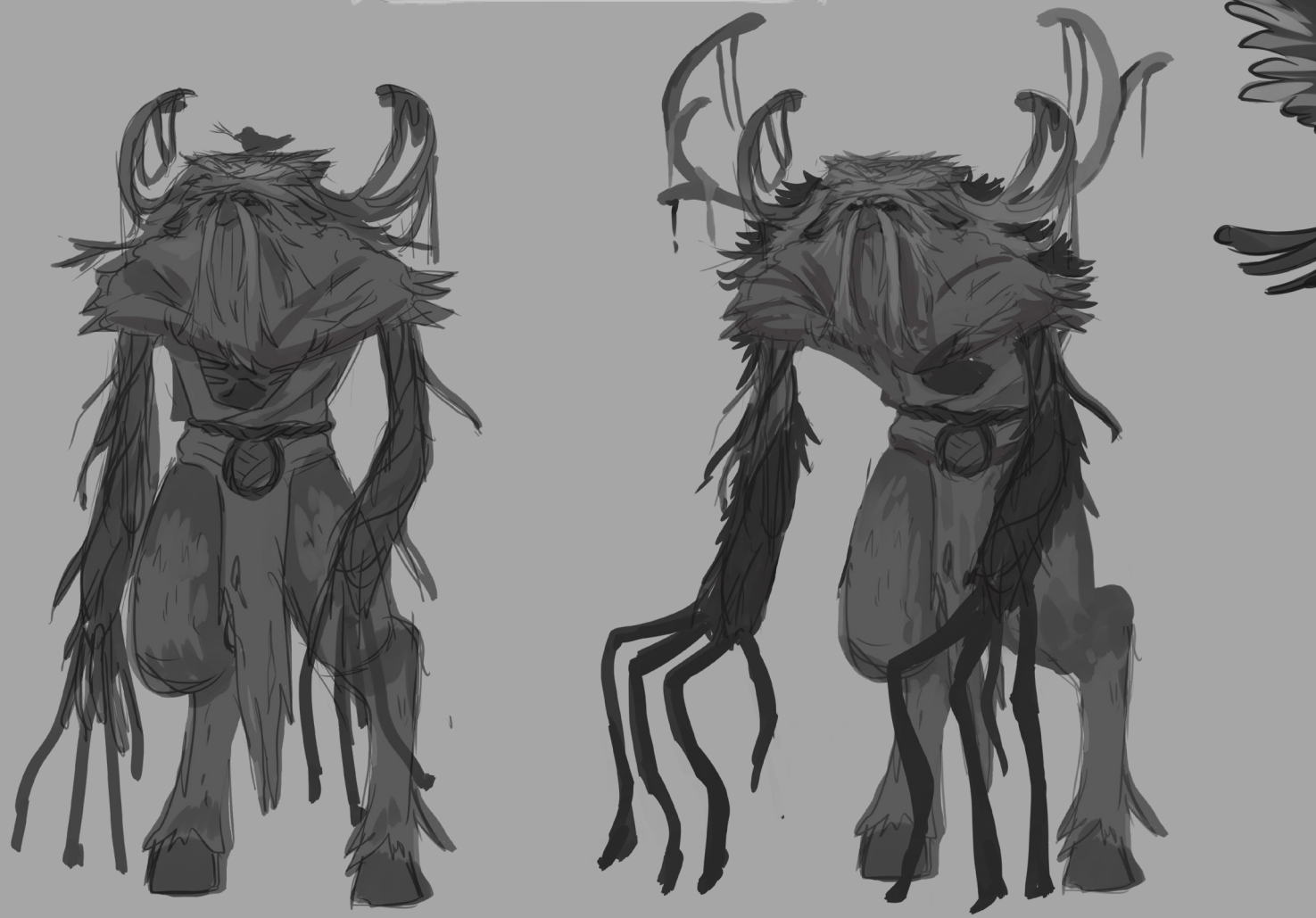
CREATURES

BABUSI



On the edge of the Deep Forest wanders little Babusi. Shaking from cold, unable to speak of hunger, looking at you with their deep old tired eyes, shaking their little hands as if begging wanderers for help. Alas, for people and creatures who fall for it, the little deceiving grandmas are in fact a walking dead shell inside of which lives a creature not so unharmful.

LESHIY



Leshiy is known to be a calm creature, a guardian of the forest. Many people who have encountered it find it very peaceful and harmless. Some people living near the forest worship it and even believe that their prey during the hunt is distributed by its will.

While being a mostly harmful creature, it is sentient and is able to speak to humans when a human acts disrespectfully toward it or the forest. It may put them in an eternal loop in the forest so the person never finds their way back.

Sirin and Alkonost

The Birds of Joy and Sorrow whose beautiful voices make people forget everything they know and want nothing more from life again.

Baba Yaga

The old hag Baba Yaga is a notorious witch, loving to feed on children's flesh. Baba Yaga can ride through the air in a mortar that she drives with a pestle. Those who stumble upon her need wit to outsmart her.

Bieda

The long dead from unhappiness, a former human Bieda, now travels from house to house hiding in the shadows of the furniture and draining all of the luck out of the inhabitants of the house.

Vodyanoy

The water spirit likes interacting with humans, which is not mutual on the humans' side since the spirit likes to tease and fool around with them until someone drowns.